



Patrick Phelps a foundation member writes:

"I work in Christchurch....but I'm from Hokitika originally!"

Often the response I give when people ask where I'm from. Heaven forbid someone mistake me for a Cantabrian.

It never feels like I'm away from the Coast for too long, I must drive back and forth about once a month or so. The drive through the Canterbury high country from the top of Porter's Pass is pleasant, whether it's the snow on the tops in winter, or the water shimmering on Lake Pearson in summer, but it can never go fast enough.

I just can't wait for the feeling of relaxation, of being home, when you cross the 'Westland District' sign just by the Otira viaduct, an area I've come to call 'the border'.

I'm sure other long-distance Coasters feel the same way, and maybe they can describe it better than I. After my family and my friends, I think the thing I miss the most about the Coast is the bush.

Or the sea.

Or the view of Mt.Cook from the paddock by our house.

Perhaps it's the fact I can enjoy all of these at once, and the mixture of native bush, salt air, pasture, manure, and fresh rain on tar seal is a smell I don't think I'll ever forget.

My parents and my grandparents came to Hokitika in the mid 1980s for eighteen months to mine gold. The gold's gone now, but I'm happy to say after almost thirty years they're still here.

So's our Komatsu.

A lot of our land, a small block just south of Hokitika, is covered in rimu and kaihikitea forests. My grandad, Freddy, helped me build a hut in the rimu when I was fourteen. I'm almost twenty-one now and I'm as proud of now as I was the day I put the last nail into it, which went in a lot easier than the first.

I still go out and light the fire and boil up the billy when I can.

I work as a journalist now in Christchurch for Radio New Zealand.

The upbringing I had place I was raised has without a doubt been a huge asset in my career so far. The fact I've worked on farms, in workshops, and as a tourist guide, and that my family's worked in mining and roading helps a lot.

That I've done a bit of tramping and hunting, helps me relate to people who have the same interests and work in those industries. As my granddad told me, it costs nothing to carry knowledge, but it sure pays.

Hokitika, I'm told, means place of return. It's not a case of if I'll come back, but when. As much as I miss home, it's important, I think, to go away and see and do different things.

If the pioneers didn't have curiosity and drive to look further afield, the West Coast and New Zealand wouldn't have come so far in such a short time.

After all, if my family hadn't wanted to leave Gisborne, I would have never been born on the West Coast.

I also miss the sunsets over the sea.

Patrick Phelps